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SUBJECT: FINLAND SCENE-SETTER FOR CODEL SPECTER, AUG. 19-20

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: The visit of Senators Arlen Specter and John Thune to Finland offers the United States important opportunities: (1) to encourage Finland to take a greater role in NATO-led crisis management and reconstruction operations, especially in Afganistan; (2) to urge Finland to join other EU member states in ratifying extradition and mutual legal assistance (MLAT) agreements; and (3) to welcome and reinforce the Finnish goal -- shared by the Cabinet and the Parliamentary leadership -- of improving relations with Washington. The visit also offers a unique Finland-Pennsylvania public diplomacy opportunity. END SUMMARY.

FINLAND: AN OVERVIEW

¶2. (SBU) With a population of 5.2 million, Finland is an archetypal Nordic welfare state. High taxes pay for a robust "cradle to grave" system of services and benefits of which the Finns are very proud. A strong culture of "consensus politics" informs the political system and fosters an egalitarian ethos that dominates Finnish society. Finnish politicians take great interest in US politics and our political culture, and they respect our democracy and our achievements. However, the intense and sometimes acrimonious competition that characterizes the US two-party system is somewhat alien to Finns, whose multi-party system forces the eight parties in Parliament to form new coalitions after every election and to seek consensus and compromise on nearly every key legislative issue.

¶3. (U) The Second World War is the seminal event in Finnish history and remains the second key reason for Finland's consensus style of politics and governance. After the USSR invaded Finland in 1939, the Finns went to war with the Germans as allies. Although Finland prevented Soviet occupation, it came at the cost of tens of thousands of lives lost and significant territorial concessions at the end of the war. This existential crisis still plays a major role in Finnish political, social, and cultural thought, and led to two generation's of skepticism about collective security arrangements such as NATO and great power politics. Above all, maintaining a modus vivendi with Russia -- the only realistic potential threat to Finland's existence -- is the priority of every Finnish government. During the Cold War, Finland occupied a

"betwixt and between" place in Europe. Its special position between east and west made it useful to both Washington and Moscow, and many east-west meetings and summits were held in Helsinki, including the first rounds of the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT).

THE CURRENT POLITICAL SITUATION

¶4. (SBU) Finland held a general Parliamentary election in March 2007. The opposition Conservative Party (CONS) made large gains and joined the Center Party (CEN) in forming a center-right government. The long dominant Social Democratic Party (SDP) fared poorly and found itself in opposition for only the second time in 40 years. The sitting Prime Minister, Matti Vanhanen (CEN), remained in place, but Conservatives took over influential posts such as foreign minister, finance minister, defense minister, and speaker of parliament. The success of the center-right parties is largely attributed to fiscal policy, and to a desire for at least modest tax relief, especially by small business owners. There was also some feeling that the left-wing Social Democrats were sidelining Finland in EU and international affairs by clinging to an outmoded brand of non-alignment. The new government has many fresh faces and a fresh approach, particularly as concerns trans-Atlantic dialogue and bilateral relations with the US, which it is actively seeking to revitalize. However, there is broad consensus among all Finnish parties on the bedrock issues of foreign and domestic policy. Indeed, the elections do not signify a "break" with the past: Finland will remain a robust welfare state; egalitarianism remains an important social value; and, in international relations, opposition to "unilateral" military action coupled with

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support for multilateral efforts (normally under UN auspices) will remain paramount.

US-FINNISH RELATIONS: PURSUING CONCRETE GOALS

¶5. (SBU) Since coming to office in mid-April, Finland's new government has said literally all the right things concerning our bilateral relationship. The Cabinet and Parliament's leadership have stated clearly that they want to build a warm relationship with Washington. Foreign Minister Ilkka Kanerva, who met with Secretary Rice June 11 in Washington, is genuinely determined to undo damage done to the bilateral relationship by his predecessor, a left-wing Social Democrat who was often gratuitously critical of the US. Kanerva and other Finnish leaders are eager to put the tone and substance of the bilateral relationship back on track.

HOW CODEL SPECTER CAN HELP US MOVE THE US AGENDA FORWARD

¶6. (SBU) URGING A GREATER ROLE IN AFGHANISTAN: The most important single issue CODEL Specter can raise to support the Embassy's mission in Finland is the NATO/ISAF mission in Afghanistan. The GOF currently has 104 peacekeepers on the ground at Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) in Meymaneh and Mazar-al-Sharif, along with a small but highly effective civilian team that supports the PRTs with appropriate, targeted reconstruction assistance. Afghanistan is also at the top of Finland's overall list for reconstruction aid, with \$12 million in annual funding secured for at least the next six years. (NOTE: Northern Afghanistan has not been the site of heavy fighting, and the Finns have been able to contribute to promoting stability and recovery. However, Finland did lose one peacekeeper to a roadside bomb in the spring. END NOTE.)

¶7. (SBU) Our challenge now is finding ways to help the new government do more in Afghanistan. At the time of your visit, the government will be actively engaged in compiling a major report examining all aspects of the security situation in Afghanistan and Finland's role there. Details

have not been made public, but the Embassy understands that the Ministries of Defense and Foreign Affairs, who have chief responsibility for the report's recommendations, will recommend increasing Finnish troop contributions to NATO/ISAF, with a long view toward Finland's assuming leadership of a PRT in 2008 or 2009. The CODEL's statements of support to Prime Minister Vanhanen, Speaker of Parliament Niinisto and other interlocutors will re-emphasize and advance the efforts the Embassy has made to urge a greater Finnish role in this crucial theatre of US operations.

¶8. (SBU) NATO COOPERATION: While many in the Conservative Party favor Finland's joining NATO, most of their Center Party coalition partners -- and President Halonen (SDP) -- strongly oppose membership. Nevertheless, the new GOF's platform clearly calls for enhancing Finland's cooperation with the Alliance. In addition to their participation in the NATO/ISAF Afghanistan operations and in NATO/KFOR in Kosovo, the Finns are now sending positive signals regarding possible Finnish participation in the NATO Response Force (NRF). However, the NRF is the subject of very intense debate in Finland. From our point of view, it would be helpful for the CODEL to welcome and encourage the Finns to announce a move toward joining the NRF -- possibly as early as this November at NATO's Force Generation Conference. It will be especially important for the CODEL to offer such encouragement to Prime Minister Vanhanen, who appears to favor Finland's joining the NRF but faces great skepticism within his own Center Party.

¶9. (SBU) BILATERAL LEGAL TREATIES: In late 2004, the US and Finland signed bilateral Extradition and Mutual Legal Assistance (MLAT) agreements that brought these instruments into conformity with the US-EU Extradition and MLAT agreements. The Embassy has been urging Finland's Parliament to ratify both agreements, and key committee

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members tell us they intend to do so as early as this fall. We also understand the US Senate Foreign Relations Committee may begin the ratification process as well. A word of encouragement from the CODEL to Speaker of Parliament Sauli Niinisto, to Justice Minister Tuija Brax, and to Parliamentary committee chairs will help move this process forward to the benefit of both our countries.

PUBLIC DIPLOMACY: THE MORTON STORY

¶10. (U) Finally, the CODEL's visit offers an opportunity to discuss a unique bit of shared history between the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and the Republic of Finland -- i.e., of John Morton. Morton was born in 1724 in the "New Sweden" colony (originally Chester County, now Delaware County) of Pennsylvania. Morton was a descendant of Matti Marttinen, a Finn from Rautalampi, Finland. He was a farmer and surveyor, and active in politics, rising to become Speaker of the Pennsylvania House, and a delegate to the Second Continental Congress. At that Congress, he cast the decisive tie-breaking vote in the Pennsylvania delegation, tipping the balance in support of the Declaration of Independence. Raising awareness of John Morton's story and the direct impact this fourth-generation Finn had on the history and independence of the United States has been among Ambassador Ware's top priorities since her arrival in Finland in early 2006.

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